

EMBRACING THE Season OF Creation

BY LAURIE ZILIAK

Though many are familiar with the seasons of the Church such as Lent and Advent, not many are aware of the Season of Creation. This season begins on September 1, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, and concludes on October 4, the Feast Day of Saint Francis of Assisi (the patron saint of animals, ecology, and the environment). It is a special time dedicated to prayer and action for God's creation and our relationship with it.



Pope Francis has embraced the annual observance celebrated by Christians throughout the world. In his message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, on September 1, 2019, Pope Francis named three important actions for celebrating the season:

1. Letting our prayer be inspired by the “symphony of creation”
2. Making time to “reflect on our lifestyles”
3. Challenging ourselves to “undertake prophetic actions” regarding our shared environment

The Season of Creation provides the perfect opportunity to encourage children to reflect on the way they understand and interact with the environment. **As teachers and catechists, we can help form young people in their understanding of creation and their relationship with it.** Consider taking some time with your group during this season to implement the actions Pope Francis identifies.



LEAD PRAYER AROUND THE SYMPHONY OF CREATION

In recognizing the beauty of creation, we can see the goodness of God as Creator. All of God's creation works together and is interconnected. The following prayer activities can be used to help the children "hear" the symphony of creation.

Pray outside: Take the children outside (or direct them to go outside if remote learning is in process) and invite them to simply observe. Help them recognize all the natural elements that surround them. Ask them to reflect on how one element impacts another aspect of nature. Invite the group to take a few quiet moments in a prayer of thanksgiving with each child saying, "For the gift of _____," and all responding, "We thank you, God."

Pray the Psalms: The Psalms themselves are prayer, and many speak to the wonder of God's creation. Identify an appropriate psalm and invite the children to pray it together. Use the same psalm for the entire Season of Creation so that children become familiar with the text. If possible, introduce a musical setting of the psalm and invite the children to sing the refrain. Some good possibilities include Psalms 8, 65, 96, 104, 147, and 148.

Illustrate the story of creation: Lead the children in a prayerful reading of the first account of Creation (Genesis 1:1-2:4). Assign each child a day of Creation and ask them to draw a picture of what was created that day. Have them include a phrase of thanksgiving on their picture (For example: "Thank you, God, for day and night.")


PROVIDE LIFESTYLE REFLECTION

Conversion begins with recognition. **Before we can make changes in behaviors and habits that negatively impact the environment, we must first be aware of them.** Empower the children to reflect on their own personal attitudes and actions with an eye toward making changes in various ways.

Document personal habits: Invite the children to keep journals on personal habits such as trash production, water usage, or the use of plastics. Invite the group to identify a habit and use a tool, such as a chart or a carbon footprint calculator, to track individual behavior. Facilitate a conversation about their results and consider factors that impact their behaviors.

Explore production: Have the group collectively identify one item that everyone uses frequently (such as a toothbrush) and have them research the item from the point of origin to consumption, naming the environmental impact for each step. Invite them to write a prayer about what they discover.





Keep a resource journal: Spend time throughout the Season of Creation inviting the children to reflect on their interaction with creation during the previous week in word or art. What natural resources have they used? What foods have they eaten? What animals have they seen and heard? How have they benefited from the Earth's resources? Invite them to conclude each entry by reflecting on how they have cared for creation.

FACILITATE PROPHETIC ACTIONS

Authentic prayer and personal reflection lead to conversion and action. Pope Francis names the Season of Creation as an opportune moment to engage in prophetic action to care for creation. He places hope for the future squarely on youth, saying, “**The young remind us that the earth is not a possession to be squandered, but an inheritance to be handed down. They remind us that hope for tomorrow is not a noble sentiment, but a task calling for concrete actions here and now.**” Facilitate concrete action and empower the passion of young people to care for creation on four different levels.

Name a personal change: Challenge each child to name a personal habit change they can make that will help them care for creation. Invite them to create visual representations of each personal change and display them as reminders.

Modify a collective habit: Invite the group to identify one change that can reasonably be made in the classroom or by each member of the group (such as using both sides of a piece of paper before moving to another page, recycling paper, or minimizing plastic use at lunch by bringing reusable utensils). Set a long-term goal to bring about change and track progress or success throughout the Season of Creation or the entire year.

Challenge the school or parish: Allow the children to observe and reflect on practices in the school or parish that could be more environmentally friendly. Invite leadership into the classroom and facilitate a conversation about possible changes that would help the parish or school better care for creation. Alternatively, share your group's collective change and invite other groups to try it in their setting.

Though the Season of Creation is limited to specific dates on the calendar, there are no limits to the challenges we are faced with in caring for the environment. Honoring this season as a time of prayer, reflection, and action can help children and adults alike to better understand the responsibility for creation and to develop behaviors to better care for our common home. ■



Quotes in this article are taken from "Remarks on the World Day of Prayer for Creation," given by Pope Francis on September 1, 2019. The full text can be found on the Vatican website, at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190901_messaggio-giornata-cura-creato.html.

SEPTEMBER 2020

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1  CREATION DAY	2	3	4	5
6  1 ST SUNDAY IN CREATION (FOREST SUNDAY)	7	8	9	10	11	12
13  2 ND SUNDAY IN CREATION (LAND SUNDAY)	14	15	16	17	18	19
20  3 RD SUNDAY IN CREATION (WILDERNESS/OUTBACK SUNDAY)	21	22	23	24	25	26
27  4 TH SUNDAY IN CREATION (RIVER SUNDAY)	28	29	30	1	2	3(4)  SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI DAY (BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS)